



# Environmental News

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## **EPA Approves Houston/Galveston Clean Air Plan**

Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Regional Administrator Gregg Cooke, joined by Texas Governor Rick Perry, approved the Houston/Galveston clean air plan at a public ceremony in Houston. The plan, formally known as the State Implementation Plan or SIP, details how the eight-county area will ensure it meets the national health-based air quality standard for ozone by 2007.

Some of the measures included in the plan include a 90 percent reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions from existing stationary sources, new requirements for large spark-ignited engines, cleaner operating ground support equipment at airports, strengthened tail pipe testing in more counties, cleaner diesel fuel requirements and lower speed limits. The SIP also incorporates a mid-course review of the plan in May 2004 to assess how the controls are working and make revisions if needed.

This approval is the latest milestone in a process started by the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. Throughout the plan's development, EPA worked closely with state and local officials, business, industry and organizations in identifying air pollution controls to help the Houston/Galveston area meet the national health-based standard for ozone.

Through the efforts of this coalition, Texas Senate Bill 5 was passed, which led the way for economic incentives to replace command and control regulations normally used to control air pollution. Senate Bill 5, also called the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan, creates economic incentives to encourage Texans to reduce air pollution and establishes a statewide Emissions Reduction Fund.

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“I have no doubt that the plan I approve today marks the beginning of a dramatic improvement in the air quality in Houston-Galveston. Our goal is that one day, there will be no more red level ozone alerts when our children cannot play outside and our elderly are put at risk,” EPA Regional Administrator Gregg Cooke said.

The proposed approval was published for public comment July 12 this year. Extensive comments were provided by environmental and industry representatives. EPA reviewed all of these comments before making its decision.

Governor Rick Perry said, “Today’s approval of the clean air plan marks an important first step toward our shared goal of providing clean air for Houston and surrounding communities. We must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to bring clean air to all Texans.”

Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission Commissioner R.B. "Ralph" Marquez said, “State and local officials have made an on-going commitment to put in place additional air pollution control measures that will ensure clean air for communities in Texas. To achieve our commitment, everyone must do their part or this plan will not succeed in cleaning the air in the Houston and Galveston areas.”

The new Houston-Galveston clean air plan is a work in progress. A scientific review already is planned for 2002. A mid-course review in 2004 will assess how the plan is progressing and make improvements if needed.

Jack Steele, Executive Director of the Houston-Galveston Area Council, said, “Today’s approval of our region’s clean air plan proves our region can tackle tough challenges by working together. This is only the beginning, however, and we have more work to do. We’ll need to stay together and stay focused to be sure our region has the best possible air.”

EPA continues to negotiate with sources of air pollution that are normally outside of the state's ability to regulate. For example, EPA recently signed voluntary agreements involving railroads and marine vessels, which should cumulatively reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by 3.1 tons a day.

More information on the SIP is available on the Internet at <http://www.epa.gov/earth1r6/news/>.

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